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CORRECTIONS TO THE CRITICAL READING OF THE GOSPEL OF THOMAS

BY

APRIL D. DECONICK

I have visited recently the Houghton, Bodleian, and British Libraries where I examined P. Oxy. 1, 654, and 655 in preparation for the publication of new companion monographs on the *Gospel of Thomas*.¹ I also ventured to the Coptic Museum in Old Cairo where I studied the full Coptic manuscript. My examination of these manuscripts has led to several critical notes and corrected readings of the Gospel.

1. P. Oxy. 1.24

My direct examination of P. Oxy. 1 (= MS Gr. th. e. 7 [P]) at the Bodleian Library has led me to a corrected reading of line 24 on the verso of the fragment. In the standard critical edition of the Greek fragments of the *Gospel of Thomas* by H. Attridge, he offers the reading, Ε[ΙΣΙ]Ν ΑΘΕΟΙ.² He

I would like to thank Dr. Bruce Barker-Benfield, Senior Assistant Librarian in the Duke Humfrey's Reading Room of the Bodleian Library, for his kind assistance with the P. Oxy. 1 fragment, and Mm. Kamilia Makiam, the Director of Manuscripts in the Coptic Museum, for her generous assistance with the Coptic manuscript. I wish to thank several people who graciously assisted my travel to Egypt and facilitated my application to examine the Coptic manuscript: Dr. Zahi Hawas, Secretary General of the Supreme Council of Antiquities; Dr. Phillip Halim, Director of the Coptic Museum; Mm. Amira Khattab, Deputy Director of Research and Government Relations for the American Research Center in Egypt; Dr. Gawdat Gabra, former Director of the Coptic Museum. Finally, I am indebted to Illinois Wesleyan University which supported my travel and research with a generous faculty research grant.

¹ A. D. DeConick, *Recovering the Original Gospel of Thomas. A History of the Gospel and Its Growth* (London: T & T Clark, 2005) and *The Original Gospel of Thomas in Translation with commentary and new English translation of the complete Gospel* (London: T & T Clark, 2006).

² H. Attridge, "Appendix: The Greek Fragments," in B. Layton, *Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2-7 together with XIII, 2**, *Brit. Lib. OR. 4926(1)*, and *P.Oxy. 1, 654, 655*, v. 1, NHS 20 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1989) pp. 96-128.

states that the first letter to the left of the Θ appears to be one that consisted “of a line sloping from the upper left to the lower right portions of the letter space.” He also sees below and to the left of this line the bare trace of a curved stroke. He imagines that this curved stroke could have continued on a diagonal upwards, until it intersected the sloping line. Thus he concludes that this letter is A.³ This opinion is in conformity with B. Grenfell and A. Hunt’s statement that this letter could be A, X, or Λ , although A was preferred.⁴

To the immediate left of this letter, Attridge describes a vertical stroke consistent with H, I, N, Π , Γ , T and Ψ .⁵ Attridge favors N. Scholars have agreed, including Attridge, that the letter space to the left of this letter has room for two letters. Attridge’s reconstruction, however, shows three letters, although two of them are iotas. Thus, Attridge’s reconstruction of the last segment of line 24 follows F. Blass which Grenfell and Hunt accepted: E[$\text{I}\Sigma\text{I}$] N $\text{A}\Theta\text{E}\text{O}\text{I}$.⁶

But Blass and Grenfell and Hunt did not have the Coptic in front of them to aid in their reconstruction. If they had, they would have been concerned that their reconstruction disparages the Greek and Coptic texts since the Coptic reads, $\text{ϩ}\bar{\text{N}}\text{N}\text{O}\text{Y}\text{T}\text{E}\ \text{NE}$. Why did Attridge, who had the Coptic, render the Greek in such a way that would perpetuate opposite and contentious readings in these manuscripts? The reason for continuing this disparate reconstruction appears to be because the Coptic is nonsense, “Where there are three gods, they are gods.” Clearly the Coptic is a corrupted text. Attridge’s reconstruction of the Greek makes a case for corruption at the level of Coptic translation where the A-privative was accidentally lost.⁷ The problem with this line of reasoning is that the Greek reconstruction is not any more sensible than the Coptic, “Where there are three, they are without gods” or “Where there are three, they are godless.” It is noteworthy that even Attridge struggles with this fact, rendering the plural $\text{A}\Theta\text{E}\text{O}\text{I}$ in the singular, “Where there are three, they are without God.”⁸

³ H. Attridge, “The Original Text of Gos. Thom. Saying 30,” *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 16 (1979) pp. 155-156.

⁴ B.P. Grenfell, and A.S. Hunt, $\text{A}\text{O}\text{G}\text{I}\text{A}\ \text{I}\text{H}\Sigma\text{O}\text{Y}$. *Sayings of our Lord from an Early Greek Papyrus* (London: Henry Frowde for the Egypt Exploration Fund, 1897) p. 13.

⁵ Attridge, “The Original Text,” pp. 155-156.

⁶ Blass, F., “Das neue Logia-Fragment von Oxyrhynchus,” *Evangelische Kirchenzeitung* (1897) pp. 498-500; Grenfell and Hunt, $\text{A}\text{O}\text{G}\text{I}\text{A}\ \text{I}\text{H}\Sigma\text{O}\text{Y}$, p. 13.

⁷ Attridge, “The Original Text,” pp. 156-157.

⁸ Attridge, “Appendix,” p. 127.

My own physical examination of this fragment at the Bodleian has made this reconstruction doubtful in my mind, if not impossible. The manuscript in the area in question is eroded, leaving only traces of partial letters. The Θ is clear. In the letter space left of the Θ are traces of ink in a distinct pattern. Visible traces move from the top left corner diagonally to the lower right corner. There is a dot of ink in the lower left corner and what appears to be a trace in the upper right corner. When the ink traces are connected, the only letters they could be according to the hand of the scribe are X or N. To the left of this letter, in the center of the letter space is a strong vertical stroke that fills almost half of the vertical space. Because the stroke appears centered in the space with no trace of a horizontal cross stroke, the letter must be either T or I. What about the letter space to the left of this letter? The manuscript is extremely eroded and fragile here, but the space is indicative of two letters, not three as Attridge's reconstruction has it. Immediately to the left of these two letter spaces are two short horizontal lines in the upper- and mid-letter space.

What reconstruction does this leave us with? Only one, and one consistent with the Coptic, E[Σ]ΙΝ ΘΕΟΙ. This suggests that the Greek read, "Where there are three, they are gods." Like the Coptic, it is nonsense. Even the Coptic scribe was confused by it, since he tries to make some sense by interpreting "three" as a specific reference to the "gods." So he adds ΝΗΟΥΤΕ after ϣΩΜΤ.

But this certainly was not the meaning of the Greek. How do we explain the Greek? Quite easily. It appears that the Greek translation ΘΕΟΙ was a mistranslation of a Semitic plural form of "Elohim," perhaps the Aramaic "Elahin." The saying must have read, "Where there are three (people), Elohim is there." Such a saying has full parallels in Jewish literature and belongs to this historical context (cf. *Mekilta*, *Bahodesh* 11; *Pirke Aboth* 3.2, 6-7; *b. Berakoth* 6a). The Greek translator was sloppy since he mistook Elohim, the Hebrew name for God, for ΘΕΟΙ.

A. Guillaumont proposed this as an explanation for the Coptic manuscript almost fifty years ago in 1958. But it appears not to have been taken seriously given the accepted reconstruction of line 24, even though Guillaumont, J. Fitzmyer and T. Akagi each envisioned the same reconstruction I have set forth in this short note upon my physical examination of the original leaf.⁹ My reexamination of the Greek papyrus lends further

⁹ A. Guillaumont, "Sémitismes dans les Logia de Jésus retrouvés à Nag-Hamâdi," *Jd* 246 (1958) pp. 114-116; J. Fitzmyer, "The Oxyrhynchus Logoi of Jesus and the Coptic

credulity to Guillaumont's old insight. It offers a simple solution to a perplexing logion, to its difficult interpretative as well as textual history. Put simply, the Greek reconstruction of the critical reading of the *Gospel of Thomas* P. Oxy. 1.24 should be emended:

Ε[ΙΣ]ΙΝ ΘΕΟΙ

“they are gods”

2. *P. Oxy. 654.8-9*

The British Library houses the Greek fragment which contains the first verses of the Gospel. What was very noticeable to me on first glance at the papyrus is that the fragment is broken in half vertically along the entire center of the page, leaving us with only the first half of the lines. I was able to approximate with confidence that the number of letters in each line was around 30 (33 the upper limit). This means that line 654.8-9, as it has been reconstructed by H. Attridge, is incorrect.¹⁰ As the manuscript stands, lines 8-9 read ΒΗΘΕΙΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣΗ ΚΑ[. . .]ΗΣΕΤΑΙ. Line 8 shows 17 letters or partial letters, leaving room for approximately 13 letters. Attridge's reconstruction, κα[ὶ βασιλεύσας ἐπάναπα]ήσεται, allows for 18 letters, which appears to me to be a physical impossibility, extending the line to 35 letters.

A more likely reconstruction would be κα[ὶ βασιλεύσας ἀναπα]ήσεται (16 letters) or even κα[ὶ βασιλεύσας πα]ήσεται (13 letters). Even though the former reconstruction is slightly longer (although still physically possible given the space limitations), I prefer it to the latter because the former reading occurs in the variant reading of this saying found in the *Gospel of the Hebrews* and recorded by Clement of Alexandria in *Strom.* 2.9.45: “One who has marveled will rule, and one who has ruled will rest (ἀναπαήσεται).”

The longer ἐπάναπαήσεται is found in another variant of the same saying recorded by Clement from the *Gospel of the Hebrews* (*Strom.* 5.14.96). Perhaps this variant influenced Attridge's choice. The available space, however, cannot accommodate the prefix ἐπ-. Rather than ἐπάναπα]ήσεται, the critical reading of the Greek version of these lines must have read:

Gospel According to Thomas,” in *Essays on the Semitic Background of the New Testament* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1971) p. 398; T. Akagi, *The Literary Development of the Coptic Gospel of Thomas* (Ph.D. dissertation, Western Reserve University, 1965) p. 299.

¹⁰ Attridge, “Appendix,” p. 113.

κα[ὶ βασιλεύσας ἀναπα]ήσεται
 And once he is a king, he will rest.

3. *P. Oxy. 654.9*

Following ΛΕΓΕΙ Ι, the missing part of line 9 of the Greek manuscript has room for up to 14 spaces. This indicates that the Greek text does not agree with the Coptic as H. Attridge's reconstruction of only 6 spaces has it—λέγει Ἴ [η(σοῦ)ς ἐάν], where ΙΗΣ uses 4 letter spaces.¹¹

How the Greek text exactly varied is uncertain to me. Any reconstruction would be purely conjecture since there is no parallel in the Coptic to aid us. But it is certain that the Greek contained at least another word of five to eight letters, perhaps something like αὐτοῖς. So the critical reading should allow for these extra spaces:

Λέγει Ἴ [η(σοῦ)ς . . . ἐάν]
 Jesus said [. . ., "If] etc."

4. *P. Oxy. 654.15*

I have reconstructed the second half of line 654.15, ἡ βασ[ιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν] instead of ἡ βασ[ιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ] because the available space requires it. The broken section of the line has room for 14 to 17 spaces. So the 15-space reconstruction ἡ βασ[ιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν] fills the lacunae more accurately than the shorter 12-space τοῦ θεοῦ, which H. Attridge appears to have adopted from J. Fitzmyer.¹²

The reading "Kingdom of Heaven" is preferred too because "Kingdom of God" as a title appears nowhere in the *Gospel of Thomas*, except the Greek fragment of L. 27. Other variants of the saying in the Manichaean Psalm-Book (160,20-21)—"The Kingdom of Heaven, look, it is inside of us. Look, it is outside of us. If we believe in it, we shall live in it forever" (ΠΛΗΤΡΟ ΝΑΠΗΥΕ ΕΙΣΤΕ ΜΠΝΩ[ΟΥ]Ν ΕΙΣΤΕ ΜΠ[Ν]Β[ΔΔ] ΕΝΝΑΩΤΕ ΔΡΑΣ ΝΑΩΝΩ ΝΩΗΤΣ ΨΑΝΙΔΝΗΩΕ)—and Hippolytus (*Ref.* 5.7)—"(The Naassene) says (that a happy nature) is the Kingdom of Heaven to be sought for within a man" (τὴν ἐντὸς ἀνθρώπου βασιλείαν

¹¹ Attridge, "Appendix," p. 114.

¹² Attridge, "Appendix," p. 114; Fitzmyer, "The Oxyrhynchus Logoi," p. 521.

οὐρανῶν ζητουμένην)—have “Kingdom of Heaven” as well. This reconstruction is in agreement with the earlier work of O. Hofius and D. Mueller.¹³ So P. Oxy. 654.15 should read:

ἡ βασ[ιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν]
 “the Kingdom of Heaven”

5. *P. Oxy. 654.25*

I have reconstructed the broken area in line 654.25, π[ρῶτοι ἔσχατοι] instead of π[ρῶτοι ἔσχατοι καὶ] as H. Attridge has reconstructed it.¹⁴ There is only room for 12 letters. So the 15 letters proposed by Attridge looks to me to be implausible. This new reconstruction allows for a simpler reading, with a single καὶ in the final clause instead of a double:

ὅτι πολλοὶ ἔσονται π[ρῶτοι ἔσχατοι] οἱ ἔσχατοι πρῶτοι καὶ [. . .]σιν

“For many who are first will be last, the last will be first, and they [. . .].”

6. *P. Oxy. 654.26-27*

The reconstruction of lines 26-27 of P. Oxy. 654 is difficult given the 10 to 12 spaces available to complete the lacunae—KAI[. . .]ΣΙΝ. M. Marcovich’s suggestion, [εἰς ἔν καταντήσου]σιν, has been followed by H. Attridge even though it requires an impossible 15 letters to complete the lacunae.¹⁵

Marcovich cites Ephesians 4:13, John 17:11, 21, 22, and 23 as parallels to this expression in order to give his reconstruction credibility. But careful examination of these texts shows that none of these passages provides a complete parallel to L. 4.4. Ephesians uses the verb as a reference to unity but does not have εἰς ἔν, while John uses the expression εἰς ἔν with a completely different verb.

Given these facts, I think it best to look at other options. I favor O. Hofius’ reconstruction, [εἰς γενήσου]σιν. It not only fits the available space, but it also agrees with the Coptic. Forms of **ΟΥΔ ΠΟΥΩΤ** were

¹³ Mueller, D., “Kingdom of Heaven or Kingdom of God?” *VC* 27 (1973) pp. 269-276.

¹⁴ Attridge, “Appendix,” p. 115.

¹⁵ M. Marcovich, “Textual Criticism on the *Gospel of Thomas*,” *JTS* 20 (1969) pp. 60-61; Attridge, “Appendix,” p. 115.

used commonly to translate εἷς, rendering the notion “single person,” while **ϣΩΠΕ** translated γίγνομαι.¹⁶ The text would have read:

[εἷς γενήσου]σιν

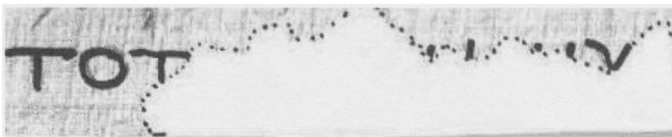
“they will become single people.”

7. NHC II,2,39.34

G. Riley has suggested an alternative reconstruction to B. Layton’s critical reading of the damaged portion of NHC II,2,39.34: “then you will come” (**ΤΟΤ[ΕΤΕΤ]Ν[Ν]ΗΥ**) instead of “then you will see.”¹⁷ He defends his reading by saying that it takes into consideration the ink traces and available space he sees on plate 49 of the *Facsimile Edition*, making **H** a more probable reading than **Δ** near the end of line 34.¹⁸

M. Meyer, however, has written a rebuttal to this position, noting that in other photographs, including the negatives and the microfilm in the Nag Hammadi Archive housed in the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity at Claremont Graduate University, there is no evidence for the horizontal stroke near the end of line 34 which Riley saw in the *Facsimile Edition*. His reexamination of the original fragments in the Coptic Museum in Old Cairo several years ago also showed no trace of such a horizontal ink stroke. He concludes that the line Riley saw “is not ink at all but rather an unretouched portion of the black background of the photograph.”¹⁹

I too examined this line carefully in the original Coptic manuscript. There is no evidence of a horizontal stroke such as we can see in the *Facsimile Edition*. The original looks like this:



¹⁶ Crum, 494a and 577b.

¹⁷ G. Riley, “A Note on the Text of *Gospel of Thomas* 37,” *HTR* 88 (1995) pp. 179-181; Layton, *Nag Hammadi Codex II*, 2-7, pp. 68-69.

¹⁸ *The Facsimile Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices*, Codex 2 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974) p. 49.

¹⁹ M. Meyer, “Seeing or Coming to the Child of the Living One? More on the *Gospel of Thomas* Saying 37,” *HTR* 91 (1998) pp. 413-416.

In order to record and publish this finding, I asked the curator to take a photograph of this section of the manuscript. When I returned to pick up the photograph and continue my examination of the papyri, I was shocked to see the same dark horizontal line appear in my photograph that is visible in the *Facsimile*.

It immediately occurred to me that the error might be the result of a shadow line cast by the thickness of the papyri and the unique break line on the edge of the manuscript. So I asked for permission to have a second photograph taken with the manuscript leaf turned upside down. When this was done, the dark line disappeared, reproducing more faithfully the original ink marks on the manuscript itself.

So, by accident, I have discovered why the *Facsimile* is in error. The shadow line from the thickness of the papyrus was enough to create a dark line in the *Facsimile* photo. The error was an illusion of photography and light.

I have made a very careful reconstruction of the line based on the original ink marks. $\text{N}\delta\Upsilon$ remains the best reconstruction.



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